

# The Psychology of Counseling

*Professional Techniques for Pastors, Teachers, Youth Leaders, and  
All Who Are Engaged in the Incomparable Art of Counseling*

*by*  
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## Chapter 1 -The Importance Of Counseling

A minister phoned a psychologist friend one morning and asked for a referral suggestion. "This case really shocked me," the pastor said. "He is a member of our church, apparently a fine spiritual man. But yesterday the police picked him up on a serious charge"

After discussing the problem for several minutes the psychologist asked, "What does this experience indicate to you?"

"Several things," replied the pastor, "but especially this: there is a great need for counseling. If I had allowed time for individual counseling, he might not have committed this crime at all."

Most pastors realize the importance of the pulpit ministry but some have not fully considered the significance of the counseling ministry. It has been said that a minister who does not place a strong emphasis on counseling is only "half a minister."

There are some basic reasons why counseling is so important. One is that it focuses on the needs of individuals.

Pulpit preaching is a blessing, but it may not always meet One's specific needs. Gloria, for example, is very concerned about a matter that stands in the way of marriage. But she does not get the particular help she needs from a sermon.

Don, on the other hand, has a very different problem: homosexuality. He knows that unless his situation improves he is likely to have serious trouble. Does he get anything from the speaker at the youth meeting? Yes, but not the individual help he needs for his own peculiar problem.

Mrs. Smith's daughter has gone away to college. During the year she has written her mother saying that she will not return home next summer. She thinks she will spend the time in a nearby city. Mrs. Smith realizes that her daughter is slipping away from the Lord. Naturally, Mrs. Smith is concerned. She needs counsel -- individual guidance. On Sunday she does not receive much benefit from the message because her mind is preoccupied thinking about her daughter.

So it is, every person has his own interesting world. And we do not enter people's worlds by taking a "pot-shot" at them. Someone has said that people are not born in bunches and we usually do not solve their problems in bunches. We help people most when we talk with them *individually*.

Another reason why counseling is important is because it enables one to work on highly *personal* problems. Wonderful teaching and inspiration can be found in books and lectures. But some topics do not lend themselves to public or mass discussion. When we

counsel with people individually, however, we reach their personal and innermost problems.

Counseling is important because it is *two-way* communication. The counselee as well as the counselor talks. And we do not grow or change much unless we are given the opportunity to discuss our problems thoroughly. A message or a lecture is *one-way* communication. We talk *at* people. We consider them targets which we hope to “hit.” But when we counsel individually, the counselee also has something to say. He thinks and talks with the counselor. This is two-way communication — and it brings results.

Counseling is also important because it has a *depth aspect*. We can only go part way with such media as books, lectures and television. Sometimes our efforts are, at best, only superficial. But work with individuals is more thorough. The client gains a much greater depth of understanding. This brings about sounder and more permanent solutions.

Every Christian worker should consider the emphasis he places on counseling. He should keep in mind that God is intensely interested in the *individual*. In Jesus’ ministry here on earth, He manifested His interest in individuals. True, He was pressed by the throngs and He fed the multitude. But He called His disciples one by one. He met Nicodemus alone to talk over the things of God. Another time He sat by a well and explained to a woman of Samaria how she could have satisfying, living water. And in a jostling street procession Jesus looked up and spotted a man sitting in the branches of a tree. He ordered the man to come down. Then Jesus left the throng and went with Zacchaeus to his home so that He could *personally* discuss this man’s needs. Still again Christ heard the pleading cry of poor, blind Bartimaeus and stopped on His way to minister to him and to give him sight. And even in the midst of the crowds who pressed closely about Him, Jesus felt the touch of *one* woman in need and said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” Yes, Jesus gave His life for *each* individual and salvation is an *individual* matter.

The good Shepherd left the ninety and nine to help *one*, poor wandering sheep. Can we do less than give people our personal attention? It is God’s way — and it is the effective way to help people with their individual needs.

## Chapter 2 - To Whom Do They Turn?

One of the signs of a healthy personality is the desire to reach out beyond one's self and become a blessing to others. This quality is especially apparent in Christians. When a person trusts in Christ as his Saviour and begins to grow into a mature Christian, he looks beyond himself for opportunities to serve. He sees people, perhaps in far away lands, perhaps in his own community, who need help. This same urge to serve mankind makes men want to counsel and help others.

However, some Christian leaders find it difficult to reach people. They have a desire to help, but it seems that problem-laden people do not gravitate in their direction. A question which seminary students and young ministers often ask is, "How do we get people to come to us with their problems?" This question is also raised by mature, experienced men and women. "We are sure we could help people," they say, "but very few confide in us.

There are some people who seem to attract others almost immediately. A study of the men and women to whom people readily turn indicates that these people usually possess certain essential qualities — characteristics which draw others to them. What are these traits? The following suggestions will help any Christian leader improve his "counselor personality."

***People usually turn to someone they know.*** It is only natural that people take their problems to a person with whom they feel comfortable — someone they know personally or to whom they have at least spoken. The more any Christian leader mixes with people and increases his personal contacts, the more likely people are to seek his help. Meetings, picnics, class parties, and scores of other occasions give any man or woman an opportunity to associate with others and acquaint himself with them. It is easy to understand why people do not usually seek strangers for help. The man (or woman) they *know* and in whom they have confidence is the one to whom people are likely to turn in time of stress.

***People take their problems to someone they like.*** It is usually not enough to know a person. Most people want to take their problems to someone whom they feel is a friend. This close identification grows out of friendliness and genuine warmth. When a person is friendly, one who can laugh, or sympathize, and one who seems to understand others, he is usually well accepted. True, it is easier for some people to show friendliness than it is for others. Yet, any Christian leader can become a warmer, friendlier person by consistently noticing others and talking with them.

***People take their problems to someone they respect.*** The person who lives an exemplary life, who is wise and discreet in his behavior, is the one who is respected and held in high esteem. This is the kind of person to whom others feel secure in taking their burdens.

Concerning respect, it is important to remember that since man looks on the "outward appearance," it is essential to dress neatly and appropriately and to conduct one's self in a

manner becoming a Christian leader. When a person's walk before God and men is such that others admire his behavior and decorum, people immediately respect him. They see that God is controlling his life and that he is a man of honor. This kind of respect opens the door for counseling.

***People are most likely to seek help from Christian leaders who indicate their interest in counseling.*** It is often said that people are constantly sending out signals. Their actions, either obviously or subtly, tell people about such things as their interests and abilities. Pastors and other Christian leaders are no exceptions. Through the many little things they do and say, people can soon tell whether they are genuinely interested in counseling.

If a pastor, for example, preaches practical sermons that apply to everyday problems, the congregation knows that he is interested in people's needs. They feel that he is a person with whom they can talk. Sermons on such topics as "The Christian Home," "Consecration," or "Youth's Greatest Decisions" indicate to the congregation that the minister is interested in counseling about such matters. In the same way a youth leader or a Sunday school teacher can let people know that he is interested in their problems by using appropriate illustrations in devotionals and talks.

Another subtle but very effective way of telling people that you are interested in them is to place the right books in your library. For example, if a person walks into the study or the home of a pastor or Christian leader and notices books about teen-age problems, marriage, sex, mental health, and such topics, he realizes that the pastor is interested in these problems. But if people never see books of this type in the pastor's library, they may feel that he does not have much concern about people's everyday, personal needs.

One of the best ways for a pastor to get close to his people and to show his willingness to help them with their problems is to conduct a series of study groups throughout the church. For example, in one church the pastor and the youth director conducted three Friday night meetings for the young people on the subject, "Courtship and Marriage." The meetings were enthusiastically attended. It wasn't long after this series that several of the young people began coming to the pastor and youth director for counsel about some of their personal problems.

Another pastor had a similar experience. He conducted two Friday night meetings for the parents of teen-agers in his church. The topic was, "What Makes a Good Christian Home?" The pastor noticed that after these meetings, the parents felt more free to come to his study and discuss their problems. Indeed, one of the best ways to encourage people to consider their problems individually is to conduct study groups, seminars and similar meetings in the church. Through these sessions people are impressed with the importance and the serious consequences of unsolved problems. And through this means they gain confidence in their leader.

***People turn for counseling to someone whom they feel is competent.*** Although other attributes are important in counseling, they do not take the place of competence. Today's

counselor must have more to offer than mere “talk.” He must be well informed and skilled.

If a person is competent, people soon realize that he is prepared to help them. Since counseling is vitally important, it deserves all the preparation one can afford. Reading books, taking courses, and getting as much information as possible about counseling helps a person to be prepared.\* And if he is competent, people will certainly make a path to his door.

***People take their problems to someone who observes professional ethics.*** People want to be especially sure that a counselor is strictly confidential. They want to be certain that he will not divulge personal information to anyone else.

It is well said that a man’s reputation “goes before him.” If he is not confidential, the word soon travels around and in a short time people avoid talking with him about personal matters. Unfortunately, it only takes a few “slips” to crystallize an undesirable reputation.

One of the best ways to establish yourself as a dependable counselor is to make sure that what is said in your office never goes any further. Even the most gifted, brilliantly trained counselor will not be sought after if he fails to be confidential. “Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” (Proverbs 25:19). People refuse to take chances on what they consider “private affairs.” So, if you would have people turn to you, be sure you guard their confidences.

***Finally, people turn to the counselor who knows God.*** In time of turbulence and trouble people want *Divine* help. They have tasted the mouldy wisdom of man. They have drunk from civilization’s broken cisterns. Now they want the pure, omnipotent help of God. They want counsel from one who is redeemed and full of the wisdom of the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup> They want to take their troubles to a person who is in touch with God — someone who can pray and trust and believe. Surely, in time of need, people turn to one who walks closely with the Lord. They look for “a man (or woman) of God.”

## Chapter 3 - The Counselor

People sometimes ask, “What is the most important thing in counseling?”

The answer is, “The counselor.”

Naturally, the counselor’s techniques are very important. He should also have an understanding of human behavior and knowledge of bibliography as well as sources of referral at his command. But the most important element in counseling is the counselor himself.

Counseling is, in a sense, a projection of the counselor.

You have heard the comment, “We rub off on people.” This is especially true in counseling. The counselee subtly learns to consider problems in the same way as does the counselor. As time is spent together the counselee is greatly influenced.

A counselor is more than an arsenal of techniques and a bag of ideas. He needs to be a firm believer in Christian principle. He needs to be energized by the power of God. He should not be like the exorcists in the book of Acts who thought they could ride along without any personal convictions, casting out evil spirits in the name of Jesus “whom Paul preacheth.” The demons were much better informed than were the exorcists concerning the ground rules. We read:

“But (one) evil spirit retorted, Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you? Then the man in whom the evil spirit dwelt, leaped upon them, mastering two of them, and was so violent against them that they dashed out of the house (in fear), stripped naked and wounded” (Acts 19:15, 16 ANT).

Actually, no one should be better qualified to counsel than the true man of God. He has accurate insight into human nature. True wisdom and understanding emanate from God. Through His Word, the believer finds the answers to life’s problems. Not only that, he has the powerful resources of prayer. As he grows in grace and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, he develops an attractive personality that radiates Christ. All of this by-passes the unsaved man. *The Amplified New Testament* (ANT) reads: “But the fruit of the (Holy) Spirit, (the work which His presence within accomplishes)—is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness; (meekness, humility) gentleness, self- control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law (that can bring a charge)” (Galatians 5:22, 23). These qualities are ones that attract counselees. They are the qualities that make us *approachable* and qualify us to help others. God says that these are the products of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

To be good counselors we must first be the right kind of people ourselves. We must let the Lord take charge of our lives. When we do, we will have the “wisdom that is from



above.” And this is the wisdom the Apostle James speaks about, the kind we must have if we are to be effective.

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

This wisdom is first **PURE**. It is not tainted by worldliness or selfish gain. It is not contaminated by our own faulty ideas. It is *sound* and *right* and *righteous*! It comes from God. Everyone gives advice; but much of it is far from right and pure. A Christian girl once went to an unsaved psychiatrist for help with an emotional problem. The psychiatrist, among other things, suggested that she “throw off all crippling restraints and live it up.” Such nonsense! This advice is satanic.

The Bible teaches that those who help others should be spiritual: “Brethren, if any person is overtaken in misconduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual — who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit — should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness, keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also” (Galatians 6:1 ANT).

When Mrs. Harvey, a Christian woman, had serious marital difficulties, she sought help from a man in her community. But she went to the wrong person. She by-passed the godly people and went to a backslidden Christian. Naturally she did not receive *pure* counsel.

Truly, it behooves every Christian counselor to live righteously so that he will have *pure* wisdom.

His wisdom is also **PEACEABLE**. Some people have the right answers but the wrong attitude. We do not help people by arguing with them. We only set up walls of resentment.

An effective counselor is peaceable. His life is marked by a peaceful nature. Peace is a rare quality. You look in vain to find it among nations and you rarely see it in individuals. You *do* find it in some Christians; but regrettably, too few. God’s Word teaches us to “rest in the Lord.” Many of us trust Him as our Saviour, but we don’t *rest* in Him. There is much peace available for the receiving. lie says, “*Peace* I leave with you, *my peace* I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Peace is the presence of Christ; and peace is the result of confessed and forgiven sin. Sometimes it seems easier to hide or excuse sin than to ask God’s forgiveness. Someone has said that peace is just as close as the nearest prayer closet. But it is closer than that. It is as near as any fervent, sincere prayer. We are prone to “figure” things out ourselves. But that is unnecessary. God merely wants us to come to Him in prayer, confess our sins and ask Him to forgive us. Then He will give peace. He does not always change

conditions — they may even remain the same. But in the midst of those conditions He gives wonderful peace.

“I remember so clearly one time,” said a man, “when I was troubled about a certain situation. For several days I thought about it, trying my best to find a solution. My heart and mind were in turmoil. Then finally, after much fretting, I got alone on my knees and talked to the Lord. I committed my burden to Him. He took the burden and replaced it with peace. Then I thought to myself, ‘I should have done this several days ago.’ My mind turned to the words of an old hymn:

O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear  
All because we do not carry  
Everything to God in prayer.

This serene, wonderful peace of God is what every counselor needs. People have confidence in one whom they sense is at peace inwardly as well as outwardly. Godly wisdom is also **GENTLE** — and easy to be entreated. How important it is to be the kind of person who is “easy to be entreated” — approachable, understanding, warm, friendly, sincere. Life for many is hard and cold. Their world is cruel and unsympathetic. Little wonder, then, that people respond to gentleness.

One of the marks of a truly born-again Christian is *gentleness*. Gentleness means carefulness in our approach to others. By nature we are children of wrath, but when God lays His hands upon us, He tames us, takes away our harshness and gives us gentle natures.

This characteristic is required in dealing with others. Have you known Christians, or even Christian leaders and ministers, who were not approachable? Their trouble may have been that they were not gentle. They were not fully under the control of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word says, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive but be *gentle* unto all men . . . .” (II Timothy 2:24).

Is your personality characterized by gentleness? If not, you can well understand why you are not used more of God. “But the wisdom that is from above is . . . gentle, and easy to be entreated.”

Godly wisdom is **FULL OF MERCY** — not critical or overbearing, but forgiving. When we think of our own shortcomings and weaknesses, it should cause us to be tolerant of others. When we think of God’s mercy toward sinners, we should become more compassionate ourselves.

Sometimes counselors are prone to judge and blame. But this is not God’s way. And naturally, it is not psychologically sound. True, we must help people learn to balance on their own two feet, but in all our dealings we should be filled with mercy.

Without any sympathy for sin, there must still be real compassion and love for the sinner. When this is lacking, little help can be given. Even among Christian leaders (who are Satan's target), there are victims who need loving help rather than cold indifference or scorn. When the enemy has been able to hook a Christian with some idolatrous bait, he lashes him into an agony of suffering that no one can know unless he has also experienced it. Satan knows no mercy; he is a foul and sly operator. Even the Saracen Saladin called a gallant truce when Richard the Lionhearted fell ill of malaria. He sent him lime water for his affliction. Not so Satan. He knows nothing of truce or fair fighting. The enemy of our souls does not strike where men and women are strong and noble. He knows where they are weak and mean and vulnerable. He strikes there.

Happily, the Christian counselor can have the armor of defense and offense that has long proved adequate against all the enemy's stock pile of weapons. This marvelous equipment of the Christian is fully described in Ephesians 6:11-17.

Godly wisdom is full of **GOOD FRUITS**. It is easy to "tell" people what to do but it is a different thing to actually help them do it. Advice is not enough. There must also be works. Goodness is an old-fashioned quality, but it is still priceless and effective in our modern society. As twentieth century people, we are taught to be sophisticated, suave, sly, smart, and clever. But unfortunately not much emphasis is placed on goodness — being filled with good fruits.

"When I think of good people," a man said, "I think of my own mother. She was a good woman and thoughtful of others. Mother often invited people to our home, even though many times it was not convenient for her. When worn out by the day's work of caring for seven children, she stayed up at night and sewed for someone who was in need. Her goodness shone through her everyday deeds and her actions revealed that she was truly a handmaiden of the Lord."

People often do not understand religion but they do understand goodness. In God's Word we are taught: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do *good* unto all men . . ." (Galatians 6:10).

When "good fruits" become a part of a counselor's daily living, he will emerge as the kind of person in whom others will have confidence. And his counseling will prove effective.

When our wisdom is from above it will be **WITHOUT PARTIALITY**. To be impartial is a difficult assignment. Our own feelings enter in so easily. But spiritual wisdom does not take sides — except against evil.

Impartiality is one of the basics of counseling. A counselor must guard against taking sides. Partiality thwarts good judgment.

For example, Mrs. Cane went to see a counselor about a marriage problem. She had serious conflicts with her husband. After the second session, she had told "her side" of

the story so convincingly that the counselor “judged” the case and advised her accordingly. One error: he gave the wrong advice.

When we daily read God’s Word, talk with Him in prayer and obey His commandments, He floods our lives with wisdom that is without partiality — a *must* in counseling.

Wisdom must be WITHOUT **HYPOCRISY**. You can be sure the principle of “do as I say but not as I do” does not spring from God. Wisdom that is from above is without hypocrisy. As translated in *The Amplified New Testament*, it is “free from doubts, wavering and insincerity.”

You have heard the time-worn saying about all the world being a stage, and all the people actors on it. This is amazingly true. The world is filled with actors — people taking a part which is inconsistent with their true feelings. Unnatural players. Saying one thing and doing another. Advising others to do what they are unable to do themselves.

When a man turns his life over to God and sincerely serves Him, God makes him *genuine*. A Christ-honoring man no longer needs to live a double life — one that he aspires to and another which he accomplishes. A saved, consecrated man is reliable. He is forthright and honest. This is the kind of man (or woman) who makes a good counselor, one who is not a hypocrite.

As we are called upon to counsel, may those with whom we counsel see godly wisdom in us. “Wisdom that is from above — first **PURE**, then **PEACEABLE**, **GENTLE**, and **EASY TO BE ENTREATED**, full of **MERCY** and **GOOD FRUITS**, **WITHOUT PARTIALITY**, and **WITHOUT HYPOCRISY**.”